

Kaiser grant to help LiveWell Colorado

By MELINDA MAWDSLEY
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Counties along the Western Slope could reap the benefits of a \$16 million state grant by Kaiser Permanente to LiveWell Colorado.

Kaiser Permanente announced its decision in December, and information about it was included in Gov. Bill Ritter's "Building Blocks to Health Care Reform" announcement Wednesday.

The grant means that LiveWell Colorado, which was created several years ago, will have the funds to become its own nonprofit organization.

"It's going to become an umbrella organization to help coordinate and oversee obesity programs across the state," said Amy Smith, spokeswoman with Kaiser Permanente in Denver. "Lots of times, little community groups try to do after-school fitness programs or senior nutrition programs, but they are all fighting for the same grant dollars and trying to make their programs as effective as possible."

With LiveWell Colorado overseeing new programs across the state, people with questions will have one place to go for information and help, Smith said.

Kristy Westerman, spokeswoman with the Mesa County Health Department, said any funding given to LiveWell Colorado is great news for the Western Slope, but changes to programs in Mesa County won't be immediate because LiveWell in Mesa County is federally funded through a public health initiative signed by President George W. Bush several years ago.

Mesa, Weld, Pueblo and Teller counties created LiveWell programs through that federal initiative. Mesa County's federal funding ends in September, and it will be eligible to apply for grant money from the state to fund its program in December, said Sarah Orth, Mesa County's LiveWell coordinator.

"It's a great opportunity, and we're looking at the sustainability of LiveWell," Westerman said. "People will have to write a grant and apply for those funds."

"There is much more money behind it now," Smith said. "We are going to make LiveWell its own nonprofit entity. ... Our charitable mission is to improve the health of a community. What better fit than LiveWell?"

LiveWell in Mesa County is preparing for its spring challenge, which encourages people to track how healthy they are through personal goals. The challenge is from March 1 to April 26.

To register or for more information, visit www.livewell.org.
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